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Letter dated 4 August 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Further to my most recent report to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2017/591), dated 11 July 2017, I hereby request the Council to consider the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is due to expire on 31 August 2017. In a letter dated 25 July 2017 addressed to me, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon requested the Council to extend the mandate for a further year, without amendment.

Further to Security Council resolution 2305 (2016), a strategic review of UNIFIL was conducted earlier in 2017. I communicated its conclusions and recommendations in a letter dated 8 March 2017 to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/202). The review took into account the evolving regional dynamics and internal context in Lebanon. The strategic priorities identified reflect a heightened emphasis on prevention, while ensuring that the necessary operational preparedness is in place for the worst-case scenario, in particular as it pertains to the mandate of UNIFIL regarding the protection of civilians. The review also identified efficiency gains that could be made without compromising the operational effectiveness of UNIFIL on land, in the air and at sea. The Force is implementing the recommendations and has adopted a proactive approach to achieving the efficiencies as a matter of priority.

The continued long period of relative calm and stability in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line, as well as in northern Israel, is significant, especially in the light of the destabilizing developments in the region. I commend both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces for their continued commitment in maintaining the cessation of hostilities and their close cooperation and coordination with UNIFIL.

The prevailing calm notwithstanding, there has been no tangible progress towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict, as called for in resolution 1701 (2006). Both parties have yet to fulfil their respective obligations under the resolution. Israel must withdraw its forces from Lebanese territory and stop violations of Lebanese airspace. The Government of Lebanon must exercise effective authority over all Lebanese territory, prevent hostile action from its territory, ensure the safety and security of the civilian population, in addition to United Nations personnel, and ensure the disarmament of all armed groups so that there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State.

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The Lebanese authorities should take all action to ensure that there are no unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons in the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River, bearing in mind the primary responsibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces in this regard. For its part, UNIFIL, in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, remains determined to act with all means available within its mandate and capabilities on specific information provided regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure inside its area of operations. It is my intention to look at ways in which UNIFIL could enhance its efforts in this regard.

The cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces through strategic dialogue remains essential to assisting the Government of Lebanon to increase the capacity, capabilities and presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon and the territorial waters of Lebanon at an accelerated pace to fully implement the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006).

Mindful of the current regional context and the multiple security challenges confronting the Lebanese Armed Forces, I repeat my call for increased and targeted international support in this regard. The Lebanese Armed Forces have identified prioritized land and maritime capabilities, which were reflected in the strategic review, specifically: a "model brigade" in southern Lebanon; the acquisition of an offshore patrol vessel; and the establishment of a civil-military cooperation centre in the south. I strongly encourage the international community to support the identified needs of the Lebanese Armed Forces for the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and to coordinate with UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, within the framework of the International Support Group for Lebanon, on how best to mobilize such support. Having a strong and sustainable presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon is a vital element in enhancing the overall State presence in southern Lebanon and in moving from the fragile cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire.

The liaison and coordination arrangements that UNIFIL has established with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, bilaterally and through the tripartite forum, remain a cornerstone for assisting the parties in finding mutually agreeable security arrangements and confidence-building measures to mitigate the scope for tension or incidents in sensitive areas along the Blue Line. I urge both parties to continue to actively engage with UNIFIL to maintain calm and prevent violations. I encourage the parties to continue to work with UNIFIL in the process to mark the Blue Line visibly on the ground in its entirety as a confidence-building measure, as well as to assist with the monitoring of violations and prevent inadvertent crossings and to find solutions for areas where agreement by the parties has not been reached to date.

The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force continues to provide training to the naval branch of the Lebanese Armed Forces and to conduct maritime interdiction operations to prevent the unauthorized entry by sea of arms or related materiel into Lebanon. By enabling a safe and stable maritime environment, it contributes to maintaining the calm in Lebanon by deterring the use of Lebanese territorial waters for illicit purposes and mitigating the spillover effects of regional crises, as well as enhancing maritime trade in that part of the Mediterranean.

UNIFIL conducts, on average, 13,500 operational activities per month. Incidents of unfriendly or aggressive behaviour towards peacekeepers by the local population or obstruction of the freedom of movement of UNIFIL occasionally occur, but the number of such instances remains small. UNIFIL outreach activities and engagement with representatives of local-level and central-level government institutions support the extension of State authority and service provision to

communities in the south. In addition, the engagement of UNIFIL troops and international and national staff with the local population through civil-military cooperation activities and quick-impact projects continues to foster support among the local population and ensure that the mandate and activities of the Force are well understood.

The total number of military personnel, as at 24 July 2017, stood at 10,466. The UNIFIL civilian component numbered 235 international and 580 national staff. I am grateful to the 41 troop-contributing countries that make up UNIFIL for their ongoing commitment. The Force, through a wide range of operational and non-operational activities, continues to play a crucial role in maintaining stability in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line and in creating an environment for a political process to take place with regard to a permanent ceasefire.

As the UNIFIL mandate approaches its expiration date, it is clear that more work remains to be done. In the absence of progress towards a permanent ceasefire, the ability of the Force to deter, prevent and deconflict will be increasingly put to the test. All efforts must therefore be expended to take advantage of the relative calm as a window of opportunity to make progress on outstanding elements of resolution 1701 (2006). In this regard, I call upon the parties to take the necessary positive steps towards a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict as called for in resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL, in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, is ready to lend its full support to the parties in this process.

I should like to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Michael Beary, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL for the work that they are carrying out in southern Lebanon and for their commitment to the service of peace.

Regarding the financial aspects of UNIFIL, by its resolution 71/307 the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $483 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 August 2017, the cost of maintaining UNIFIL would be limited to the amount approved by the Assembly.

As at 25 July 2017, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNIFIL amounted to $83.8 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $4,867.9 million. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 30 April 2017, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2017, in accordance with the quarterly schedule.

I should also like to express my appreciation for the unified and steadfast support of the Security Council to UNIFIL and its mandated activities. With the above information in mind, I recommend that the Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of 12 months, until 31 August 2018.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**